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ABSTRACT

The paper views teaching as an interaction between the teacher and students with the teacher having the responsibility of structuring the environment to assure student learning. Key findings from the study of teacher effectivness are noted, mildly handicapped students as learners are defined, and information on teaching strategies that have been found OK or not-so-OK in educating mildly handicapped children is considered. Also provided is a teaching effectiveness matrix for assessing the efficiency of instructional strategies. The matrix rates two variables: (1) amount of teacher effort required to implement the strategy and (2) amount of learning by students as a result of implementing the strategy. It is suggested that through careful study of teacher behaviors and implementation of the findings, learning among the mildly handicapped can be greatly enhanced. (Author/CL)

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OK, Not-So-OK Strategies for Teaching the Mildly Handicapped

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RUNNING HEAD: OK Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Teaching is viewed as an interaction between the teacher and students with the teacher having the responsibility of structuring the environment to assure student learning. This presentation illuminates key factors and findings from the study of teacher effectiveness, defines the mildly handicapped as a learner in the schools, and provides detailed information on teaching strategies that have been found OK or Not-So-OK in educating mildly handicapped children. Provided also is a devised teaching effectiveness matrix for assessing the efficiency of instructional strategies. It is suggested that through careful study of teacher behaviors and implementation of the findings, learning among the mildly handicapped can be greatly enhanced.

OK, Not-So-OK Strategies for Teaching the Mildly Handicapped

So, you want to be an effective teacher of the mildly handicapped? Then you are invited on an excursion that briefly explores the concept - effective teaching, concisely describes the population - mildly handicapped, and more thoroughly, investigates the impact of selected instructional strategies in teaching mildly handicapped children.

The concern for teacher accountability and federal support of educational programs are two major factors influencing the study of teaching. Thus, the major purposes for research on teaching are to (a) understand teaching and the interactions between classroom participants, (b) evaluate teachers, and (c) provide information to form a basis for inservice and preservice education programs to improve teaching (Powell & Beard, 1984).

First, those before us who have undertaken the task of investigating teacher effectiveness, readily admit that it is a difficult task (Good & Weinstein, 1986). Components of effective teaching include (a) antecedent behaviors, (b) classroom instructional activities, and (c) follow-up requirements. For example, development

and implementation of the individualized educational program (IEP) as mandated by the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act of 1975 (P. L. 94-142), illustrate the scope of the responsibility of teachers of the handicapped. Components of information for the IEP include:

1. a documentation of the student's current level of educational performance,
2. annual goals or the attainments expected by the end of the school year,
3. short-term objectives, stated in instructional terms which are the intermediate steps leading to the mastery of annual goals,
4. documentation of the particular special education and related services that will be provided to the student,
5. an indication of the extent of time a student will participate in the regular education program,
6. projected dates for initiating services and the anticipated duration of services, and
7. appropriate objective criteria, evaluation procedures, and schedules for determining mastery of short-term objectives, at least

on an annual basis (Schulz & Turnbull, 1984).

To improve teaching, teachers need to (a) further their own professional development, (b) plan more effective programs for their students, (c) be reflective and analytic as they learn from their own teaching, and (d) modify their teaching based on findings from research and theoretical literature in education (Good & Weinstein, 1986; Stallings, 1986; Zumwalt, 1986). Fortunately, educators do care about students and given encouragement and appropriate opportunity, they will work enthusiastically toward preparing students to become capable adults who will lead satisfying lives (Dillon-Peterson, 1986).

Numerous findings have been reported from studies on teacher effectiveness in the preparation of students. Among those germane to this presentation are: (a) In natural classroom settings, teacher behaviors are nested within clusters and there is a relationship between clusters of behavior and student learning. But the effectiveness of the clusters may vary by types of students, by content area, and by the level of student learning; (b) There is a relationship between teacher allocation of instructional time and content coverage and student learning; (c) A relationship exists between teacher planning and student achievement (Powell & Beard, 1984).

The Mildly Handicapped Child

This presentation focuses on effectively teaching the mildly handicapped. They are individuals with minimal learning and/or adjustment problems. Typically such persons fall into one or a combination of the categories mild learning disabilities, mild emotional disturbance/behavioral disorders, and mild mental retardation. These students usually receive their education in either full-time regular classes or resource room programs (Davis, 1980).

Educators are cautioned not to error by assuming homogeneity among the mildly handicapped. There are interindividual differences as well as intraindividual differences among these individuals with each one manifesting a pattern of strengths and weaknesses, unique past experiences, interests, desires, fears, and other characteristics that produce individuality (Safford, 1978). However, when contrasted to the general population, mildly handicapped children are more likely, for example, to have (a) met defeat, (b) parents who place little value on education, (c) inadequate health and nutritional provisions, and (d) come from broken or disorganized homes (Dunn, 1973).

Teaching the Mildly Handicapped

As stated earlier, teaching includes antecedent activities, classroom performance, and follow-up or evaluative activities. To parallel this line of thought, let us examine (a) the IEP as a launching pad for instruction, (b) instructional strategies as a teacher's choice, (c) data gathered on teacher effectiveness components, and (d) a designed teacher effectiveness matrix for determining the merit for selected teaching strategies.

IEP--A launching pad for instruction. The IEP is an instructional guide to be used in teaching handicapped children. Once the IEP is developed, teachers must employ sound instructional strategies to ensure that the annual goals for each child (Thornton, Tucker, Dossey & Bazik, 1983) are met. The teacher must regularly review the IEP in order to develop relevant daily lesson plans based on the stated goals and objectives (Evans & Hall, 1978). For "best" practice, the IEP planning process requires the input of personnel from federal, state, and local education agencies (Alter & Goldstein, 1986). Afterward, the teacher serves as manager of the instructional process on a day-to-day basis.

Instructional strategies - A choice. In recent years, the list of strategies, which includes methods, materials, and time allocations used in teaching (Wehman & McLaughlin, 1981), has become quite extensive. Which strategies are used in teaching the mildly handicapped will be left, for the most part, up to the teacher. The choice may be influenced by primary variables such as (a) the teaching style of the instructional personnel or (b) the learning style of the students. Or, the strategies employed may be influenced by secondary variables such as (a) practices established by the school administration, (b) desires of parents, or (c) available resources in the school.

Evidence does not show that a given teaching strategy is in general superior in effectiveness to another (Gearheart, 1976). Teachers differ tremendously in their teaching styles and mildly handicapped children are very heterogenious as learners. However, authorities in the field do offer suggestions about strategies that are appropriate for use.

Mercer and Mercer (1985) suggest four procedures in teaching - (a) identify target skill via assessment, (b) determine the factors and conditions likely to facilitate learning, (c) plan instruction, and (d) begin

data-managed instruction. Polloway, Payne, Patton, and Payne (1985) list 21 components of effective instruction grouped into the categories of (a) antecedents to teaching, (b) teaching behaviors, and (c) follow-ups to teaching. The above authors and other writers provide further information on instructional strategies by addressing diagnostic approaches to teaching, teacher-directed systematic instruction, learning principles to follow in teaching, and what to do when children fail to learn a lesson (Evans & Hall, 1978; Safford, 1978; Wehman & McLaughlin, 1981). As the teacher makes decisions about instructional strategies, the most practical and effective ones should be used in educating the mildly handicapped.

Effectiveness data on teaching components. There is valuable information to be gained from studies regarding the board-based effectiveness of strategies used in teaching the mildly handicapped. Effectiveness data on teaching strategies will provide information on the probable success of the strategies when employed under similar conditions. Teachers could avoid using those strategies that have been repeatedly rated as ineffective and readily try those that are more promising.

In addition to data from the study of teaching presented earlier in the presentation, at this point, we

present detailed findings from our own research on teaching strategies for the mildly handicapped. In an earlier study of the 21 components of effective teaching listed by Polloway et al. (1985), responding teachers indicated that they often, based on more than 50% of the ratings for respective items, give attention to 17. Items getting most attention by respondents were (a) continual monitoring of progress (100%), (b) acquiring appropriate instructional materials (97%), (c) matching instruction to student needs (90%), (d) clear communication of instructional demands (90%), (e) active engagement of students (90%), and (f) keeping records of student progress (90%). Items receiving least attention, with the sometimes and never options amassing 50% or more of the ratings, were (a) classroom furnishings (the two options combined, 93%), (b) classroom arrangement (51%), (c) analyzing instructional tasks (50%), and (d) using specialized/adaptive strategies (50%).

Except for classroom furnishings, the respondents said that the components enhanced learning very much. Items believed most effective, based on a high percentage of ratings for very much, were (a) grouping students for instruction (89%), (b) matching instruction to student needs (83%), (c) acquiring appropriate instructional

materials (77%), (d) active engagement of students (73%), (e) providing useful feedback to students (72%), (f) keeping records of students' progress (71%), and (g) continual monitoring of progress (70%) (Gentry & Jefferson, 1985).

A subsequent study was done on the same 21 components of effective teaching to get additional data and to use an improved survey instrument. This time the instrument requested respondents to insert numbers in the appropriate blanks where under "How often you give attention", Often was 5-3, Sometimes 2-1, and Never 0. For "How it enhances learning", Very Much was 5-3, Some 2-1, and None 0. The instrument for the first study only required a check mark under the column headings and did not produce the precision desired by the authors.

From the recent study of 24 teachers of the mildly handicapped the following key findings were noted. Respondents indicated that they often, based on more than 50% of the ratings for respective items, give attention to 20 (an increase by three over the earlier

Insert Table 1 about here

study) of the 21 teaching components (see Table 1). Items getting most attention by respondents were

(a) acquiring appropriate materials (95%), (b) student dimensions (90%), (c) grouping students (90%), and (d) matching instruction to student needs (90%).

Teaching Effectiveness Matrix. How can a teacher determine if a teaching strategy is effective or not? We are suggesting a simple rating scale with two variables

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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to provide information for answering the question (see Figure 1). The variables are (a) amount of teacher effort required to implement the strategy and (b) amount of learning taking place on the part of the students as a result of implementing the strategy. Once these assessments are made, the Teaching Effectiveness Matrix enables the teacher to determine the extent to which the teaching strategy is OK or Not-So-OK. In rating teacher effort, consider factors such as the amount of time and materials required for implementation. In rating learning enhancement, consider the achievement made by the students in reaching goals and objectives specified for the teaching.

Ultimately, effective teaching is enhanced learning on the part of the student that leads to the achievement of the IEP goal. Efficiency takes into consideration the effort of the teacher involved in the enhancement of

learning. Ideally, a teacher would want to employ teaching strategies that produce maximal learning on the part of students but require only minimal or reasonable effort on the part of the teacher. (Is it unrealistic to expect that teaching mildly handicapped children can be "easy like Sunday morning"?) Yet, it is to be expected that sometimes learning among the mildly handicapped may come only with premimum cost in effort on the part of the teacher.

We are led to believe that teachers need skill in determining the effectiveness of the strategies that they may select from a menu in individualizing instruction as opposed to a prescribed list of strategies to be used in their teaching. What they will undoubtedly find is that based on their individual teaching style and needs of their students, some teaching strategies are OK and some are Not-So-OK in teaching the mildly handicapped.

Data gathered from our recent research study was analyzed using the Teaching Effectiveness Matrix. (Note that teacher attention is used as equivalent to teacher effort). Based on highest frequency ratings for cells in Columns 1 and 2 of tallied responses, 14 of the items showed extensive (numeral 5) teacher effort and very much (numeral 5) student learning (idicating an OK reading

on the matrix). The other seven items showed some variation on the matrix. Only three items (10, 12, and 17) showed less teacher effort than the comparable amount of learning (indicating an OK to OK Plus reading on the matrix). Item 15 showed less learning than the comparable amount of teacher effort (indicating an OK to Not OK reading on the matrix). Teachers may use their own ratings of teaching strategies and apply the matrix in determining the extent to which the strategies are OK or Not-So-OK.

Summary and Discussion

The purposes of this presentation were to (a) briefly examine teacher effectiveness as a concern in American schools, (b) concisely explain the population of exceptional children classified as mildly handicapped, and (c) present data on selected teaching strategies as they are employed in educating mildly handicapped children. It appears evident from the literature that the teacher effectiveness movement will be around for a while. Teachers will undoubtly have to demonstrate higher level competence with professional skills and apply them effectively in helping children develop to their maximum potential.

Mildly handicapped children constitute a generic category of exceptional individuals with minimal learning and/or behavior problems. As with all populations, among

the mildly handicapped are both interindividual differences and intraindividual differences, but with the latter, differences are to an extent to justify individual programming.

When presented 21 components of an effective teaching model, teachers of the mildly handicapped indicated that they give the components a lot of attention in their teaching and that all the components enhance learning. Upon subjection to a devised teaching effectiveness matrix, based on ratings of the amount of teacher effort given the components and the amount of student learning that results, most of the strategies fell within the OK range. No components had ratings either in the OK Super or Not-At-All OK range.

The findings are interesting and offer a basis for varying interpretations. To suffice with a few observations and analyses, it is safe to say that teachers of the mildly handicapped (those surveyed) give a lot of attention to the components of effective teaching and feel that the attention enhances learning. However, when subjected to a teaching effectiveness matrix, the ratings primarily fall in the OK range - not many in OK Plus and none in OK Super. The ratings may please legislators, parents, and even school administrators simply because student

learning is high. But what about the extensive teacher effort? Will it lead to teacher burnout? We believe that teachers must be helped to achieve high student learning with less sheer teacher effort (as suggested by items 10 and 12 in the recent study). Teaching strategies can only be super OK on a long term basis when student learning is high and teacher effort is reasonable and manageable.

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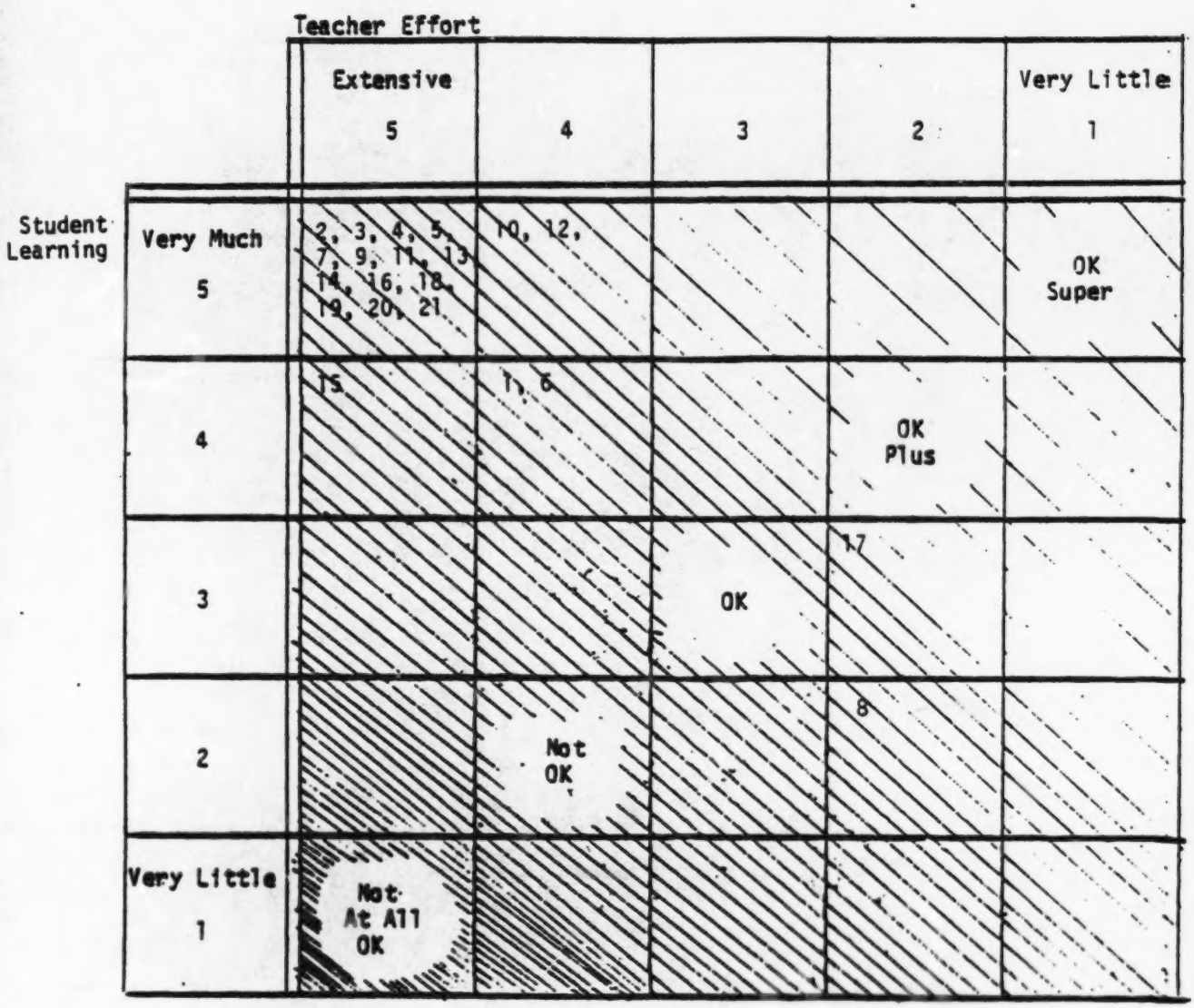
Table 1
Components of Effective Teaching - How Often They Get Attention and How Much They Enhance Learning

Components	Teacher Attention (%)						Student Learning (%)					
	Often			Sometimes		Never		Very Much			Some	None
	(No)	5	4	3	2	1	0	(No)	5	4	3	2	1	0
1. Classroom arrangement	(23)	17	48	9	17	4	4	(24)	29	33	8	17	8	4
2. Seating arrangement	(20)	35	30	15	10	10	0	(20)	40	15	10	20	15	0
3. Classroom furnishing	(20)	30	20	0	20	15	15	(19)	26	11	11	26	16	11
4. Environmental factors	(21)	62	10	10	14	5	0	(20)	55	15	15	5	10	0
5. Teacher dimensions	(21)	57	19	10	14	0	0	(21)	38	24	24	10	5	0
6. Student dimensions	(21)	24	48	24	5	0	0	(20)	20	45	25	10	0	0
7. Acquiring appropriate instructional materials	(20)	60	30	15	5	0	0	(20)	45	35	15	5	0	0
8. Scheduling	(22)	18	27	9	45	0	0	(21)	24	19	14	43	0	0
9. Grouping students for instruction	(21)	62	19	5	10	5	0	(20)	45	35	10	5	0	5
10. Record keeping system	(21)	33	38	5	20	0	5	(20)	40	20	15	15	5	5
11. Matching instruction to student needs	(21)	71	10	10	10	0	0	(20)	60	20	10	10	0	0

Table 1 continued

Components	Teacher Attention (%)							Student Learning (%)						
		Often			Sometimes		Never		Very Much			Some		None
	(No)	5	4	3	2	1	0	(No)	5	4	3	2	1	0
12. Planning a total educational program	(21)	33	38	14	14	0	0	(20)	40	35	10	15	0	0
13. Analyzing instructional tasks	(21)	38	38	5	14	5	0	(20)	35	30	20	10	0	5
14. Clear communication of instruction	(19)	47	32	11	11	0	0	(18)	44	28	17	11	0	0
15. Matching teaching strategies to corresponding stages of learning	(17)	41	29	6	24	0	0	(17)	24	35	12	18	0	0
16. Active engagement of students	(19)	42	26	11	21	0	0	(18)	44	17	22	6	11	0
17. Using specialized/adaptive strategies	(19)	0	32	32	37	0	0	(18)	6	28	33	28	6	0
18. Continual monitoring of progress	(19)	53	26	5	16	0	0	(18)	44	39	0	11	6	0
19. Providing useful feedback to students	(19)	53	26	11	11	0	0	(18)	44	17	17	17	6	0
20. Keeping record of progress	(18)	44	28	11	17	0	0	(17)	29	29	12	24	6	0
21. Evaluating/Planning for future instructions	(19)	47	16	16	21	0	0	(18)	39	28	17	11	6	0

Figure 1
Teaching Effectiveness Matrix



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